

EXPERT ADVICE: Jamie Izaks | President | All Points Public Relations



5 WAYS FRANCHISE BRANDS CAN AVOID MARKETING MISSTEPS

In today's always-on media cycle, a single marketing misstep can escalate in minutes. What starts as a poorly worded campaign line, a tone-deaf ad or an overlooked cultural cue can dominate headlines, spark memes and fill comment sections before a brand even has time to respond.

For franchise brands, the stakes are higher because a corporate misstep can ripple across dozens or hundreds of local businesses, directly impacting franchisees' reputations, staff morale and guest loyalty in each market. The reverse is also true: one franchisee's poor judgment, local controversy or public mistake can quickly

damage the national brand and, by extension, every other franchisee in the system. This is why a proactive, franchise-specific plan is necessary to prevent missteps before they start and handle them swiftly when they do.

Build Empathy into the Idea Stage

The infamous Kendall Jenner Pepsi ad remains a textbook example of what happens when campaigns are created without enough cultural awareness in the room. Most misses don't begin at launch; they start in the idea phase when no one pushes back against a risky or misguided concept.

Franchise brands have a built-in advantage here: their franchisees. Owners live



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and work in local markets, giving them a sharper sense of community values, customer expectations and potential sensitivities. By formalizing ways to involve franchisees early in the creative process, whether through advisory councils, focus groups or structured feedback loops, brands can catch blind spots before they turn into headlines.

Create Space for Pushback in the Room

Brainstorming sessions shouldn't be echo chambers. They should be pressure tests. Unfortunately, many campaigns that later spark backlash lacked diverse or empowered voices in the room.

Franchisors can foster healthier creative environments by encouraging constructive dissent. Advisory groups, pilot campaigns in select markets, or even anonymous feedback tools allow team members and franchisees to safely flag concerns without the fear of being "the lone dissenting voice." When feedback is baked into the culture, it becomes easier to spot when an idea may not resonate with real audiences.

Respond Swiftly and Humanely to Campaign Backlash

Even with the best safeguards, marketing flaws will still happen. The difference between lasting damage and a reputation boost often comes down to speed and tone.

For example, Bud Light's "Up for Whatever" bottle campaign, featured a slogan that crossed the line by trivializing consent. This serious allegation needed a serious response. The brand immediately apologized and pulled the message from circulation—showing that accountability,

when paired with quick action, can keep a misstep from snowballing.

For franchise brands, this means national leadership must act quickly while also empowering franchisees with aligned messaging. Customers expect transparency, acknowledgment and humanity, not silence or corporate jargon.

Use Strategy to Shape the Conversation

Often the product itself is merely a vehicle to strategically shape a conversation.

Take Gap's recent denim campaign with KATSEYE. Instead of the conversation centering on the product alone, the narrative that took off was about diversity, representation, and the return of Gap as a cultural force.

While the spotlight shifted away from the jeans themselves, the brand succeeded in reigniting relevance and sparking enthusiasm from audiences who felt seen in the campaign. This demonstrates that when brands strategically plan rollouts with cultural awareness and strong storytelling, they can generate conversations that extend beyond the product.

Sometimes, the conversation generated is as powerful as the change itself, but brands must be ready to manage narratives and respond to loyal audiences.

This is reflected in franchise brands, where strategy should include channel selection.

Corporate might rely on LinkedIn, press releases and national media, while franchisees focus on local outlets, word of mouth, Facebook or community boards where their customers are most active. When each audience hears the right message in the right place, brands can guide the conversation rather than chase it.

Build a Franchise-Specific PR Playbook

Franchisors must explain their intended message to their franchisees so that if the campaign sparks any buzz or interest, the franchisee can confidently speak on it. Clear rules of engagement are critical:

- Who is authorized to speak first? Corporate leadership or local franchisees?
- What language should franchisees use if approached by media?
- How can owners share customer feedback from their markets quickly so the national team can adjust messaging?

By outlining these processes in advance, franchisors prevent confusion, protect consistency and give franchisees confidence that they won't be left alone in a storm. A strong playbook isn't just about protecting the brand; it's about strengthening trust across the system.

Final Message

For franchise leaders, empathy, collaboration and strategy are essential tools for protecting both the national brand and the local businesses that represent it every day.

By integrating empathy into creative processes, encouraging pushback, responding quickly with accountability, shaping conversations strategically and building franchise-specific PR playbooks, brands can avoid potential missteps and emerge with stronger bonds across their system. ♦

